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ABSTRACT

This is a summary in outline form of the English language teaching situation in Austria. English is not the medium of instruction, and is not extensively used except in university English departments and other departments where much of the reading matter is in English. In most school districts English is begun in the third year, although in some schools it is being introduced earlier. Textbooks and other instructional materials are controlled by the Ministry of Education, leading to a rigid system allowing for little experimentation. English for special purposes is in use at some universities. Teacher training, including inservice training, and examinations, vary regionally and according to the educational level, but are generally state-controlled. Various types of private schools also contribute to English instruction. The British Council provides lecturers, teacher exchange, counselling, and other services towards the support of EFL; some contribution is also made by the United States Information Service. The outline ends with a bibliography of current relevant research and instructional materials. (AM)

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ENGLISH TEACHING INFORMATION CENTRE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROFILE

Country: AUSTRIA June 1975

1. Role of English

1.1 English is not the medium of instruction in Austria.

1.2 English is not extensively used as a study language except in various branches of tertiary education. In the English Departments in the universities literature (and linguistics) lectures are frequently given in English and at research level especially in technical and scientific subjects much of the reading is in English.

1.3 Apart from international airways traffic English is not extensively used as a medium of communication in Austria.

1.4 However, English is the most important language in international communication, especially in commerce and tourism. In the international agencies, Unido, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, English, together with Russian, French, Spanish and German, is the main language. On Radio and TV newsreels most, though not all, interviews with English-speaking peoples are dubbed. English is studied intensively at the Diplomatic Academy for civil servants and at the three interpreters and translators institutes in Austria.

2. English within the educational system

2.1 Primary schooling in Austria begins at the age of 6 and lasts till children are 10. English in most districts is started in the third year and is entirely oral, some reading and writing being introduced in the fourth year. Materials in use include: "Look and speak", Hirschbold, "One, two, three, go", Gerngross et al, and "Look, listen and learn", Alexander. About one hour a week is devoted to English at this level; enlightened schools divide this hour into two 30 minute periods, although this is by no means common practice.

In grammar schools for the first two or three years pupils have four 50 minute English periods a week which decreases to 3/2 per week in the senior forms. The textbooks which are most frequently in use are "Ann & Pat" by Walter Kacowsky and "I learn English" by Baschiera et al. Both are five year courses and antiquated in the sense that basic language patterns are not practised from the third year onwards, at which point the material emphasizes the cultural background of native English-speaking peoples. In the sixth form the prescribed texts are "The English-Speaking World" (Kacowsky) and "English the World Over" (Partman). Both are serious and scholarly. In Hauptschulen or secondary modern type schools usually only the A stream has tuition in English. "I learn English" and "Ann and Pat" continue to be used even here although there is now a marked tendency to replace them with "Look, Listen and Learn". In some Hauptschulen, on an experimental basis, English is being introduced in the lower stream too. It is sometimes possible for good secondary pupils to transfer to a special type of grammar school, the so-called musisch-paedagogisches Gymnasium at the age of 14.

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In commercial schools, the Handelsschulen (for pupils aged 14-17) and Handelsakademien (for pupils aged 14-19) ELT is initially in a general register, gradually becoming more specialised. Materials in use include: Dichler, Dichler: "English for Commercial Schools"; Schmitz-Marsten "A First Course in Commercial English" and Hahne-Janko "Commercial English".

2.2 No formal distinctions are made between English language and literature in the grammar schools; both literature and cultural background are considered to be an essential part of the language learning process and are stressed overmuch at the expense of basic oral skills. In secondary modern schools literature is not taught as such but frequent references to literary works are made in the course books that are used.

2.3 There are no public or external examinations in English at school level. The Matura or school leaving exam is always an internal affair, each teacher devising his own essay titles for the one-and-only 5 hour essay paper. (In the commercial schools referred to above, the Matura exam takes a slightly different form. It normally consists of the translation of a commercial English text into German and the composition of three commercial English letters from data presented in German.) The titles are submitted to the local inspector for formal approval. In preparation for this exam pupils in grammar schools have to write between 3 and 6 essays a year under examination conditions. Their future Matura grade is to a certain extent determined by their performance in these essays.

University exams are also internally organised. All students graduating from universities who intend to become teachers have, sooner or later, to pass the state examination, the Lehramtspruefung. This always consists of a long essay (usually on some literary, cultural or social scientific theme) plus a four-hour translation paper, which also contains some phonetic transcription. Grammar school teachers of English receive no teacher training, apart from a one-semester ELT methods course (two hours per week) and a one-semester course in general educational theory. Students graduating from teacher training colleges also have to take a state exam which is usually a watered-down affair of the one which grammar school teachers take. These students usually become secondary modern school teachers and their training includes a substantial methodological element.

In adult education at the Volkshochschulen English courses are being implemented at the end of which successful students receive a Zertifikat, similar in status and design to its parent German model. It is essentially a qualification for an office-skills occupation.

2.4 Advancement within the educational system depends to a large extent on success in the Matura of 2.3 above.

2.5 Syllabuses and choice of textbooks are centrally controlled by the Ministry of Education. School authorities supply free of charge only those books which have been approved by the Federal Textbook Committee. This has led to a rather rigid system of textbook use as parents are not keen to buy further material which the teachers are free to choose on an ancillary basis. Before a text is approved it is tried out experimentally in a number of schools. The Penguin Course, "Success with Louis Alexander's "New Concept English" currently fall into this category. It is therefore a matter of years before a new course receives approved status.

2.6 Ministry officials in each Land are responsible for seeing that the syllabus is followed and adequate teacher and in-service training is carried out. Inspection is carried out on a semi-regular basis; teachers serving their probationary year are all inspected once.

2.7 In the secondary commercial schools special-purpose English receives attention once the groundwork has been laid. In the two universities of commerce and economics in Vienna and Linz business-type English plays a significant role. In the University for Social and Economic Sciences in Linz the Bellcrest File is used. In the three technological universities English study is less prominent.

2.8 Adult education centres or Volkschochschulen are well established in Austria. There are several in Vienna and each of the provincial capitals has one or two. English is extensively studied at most of them, the courses range from beginners through intermediate, business English to proficiency.

3. Teaching cadre

3.1 Very few British teachers are employed in Austrian schools outside the official exchange schemes. In those provinces where there is a serious lack of teachers, eg Vorarlberg, it is however frequently possible for a qualified, or even unqualified, British teacher to find employment on a short-term contractual basis merely by knocking at the door of the local education authority. Casual employment for British teachers is sometimes possible at some schools with a religious foundation which appear not to be entirely under the control of the local education authorities.

3.2 All Austrian teachers, whether at grammar or secondary modern school, need to have passed the appropriate Lehramtspruefung. In those parts of Austria where there is an English teacher shortage, teachers begin teaching whilst still working for their Lehramtspruefung.

3.3 Initial teacher training has already been mentioned in 2.3 above. In-service training is loosely organized mostly on a regional basis, some provinces making better provision than others. Each Land has its teachers working group or Arbeitsgemeinschaft which invites its teachers to a meeting either once or twice a year. These meetings usually last for a day or half-day and during this period teaching problems are discussed informally and an external speaker is often invited along to pontificate about some aspect of teaching. Prominent staff in teacher training colleges and universities fall into this category as does the British Council ELO/Assistant Representative II. For secondary modern school teachers O - 3 one-week courses are organised each year and these courses stress language practice, methodological aspects of the teaching of English and background studies. The Council collaborates where possible and seeks the aid of university Lektors and British assistant teachers. The Central Ministry organises four to five courses a year for grammar school teachers who are recruited from all over Austria. These are specialist in nature, stress recent developments in methodology and are run by the British Council. Occasionally each region organizes its own course for grammar school teachers locally. All these courses take place during term time, teachers being given leave to attend.

3.4 The local professional organisations are the Arbeitsgemeinschaften referred to in 3.3 above and the Neuphilologenverband. "Moderne Sprachen is the official Austrian English teachers journal.

4. Teaching materials

4.1 The provision of textbooks has already been referred to above.

4.2 The central control implies uniformity and very little diversity in textbook use.

4.3 The most widely used texts are undoubtedly still "Ann and Pat", and "I learn English", although they were written 15 - 20 years ago. Dissatisfaction is widespread, but teachers seem unable or rather unwilling to organise themselves in protest. They probably realise the limited success their protest would achieve against the Kafkaesque Ministry wall. Strike action is virtually unknown in Austria.

4.4 Most of the films in use in the English lessons in Austrian schools are provided by the British Council Film Library which as a result of over-use is in a fairly dilapidated condition. British language teaching tapes are also heavily borrowed from us but their effective usage is constrained by the fact that they are not "approved". The traditional courses mentioned above in 4.3 also have accompanying tapes for class-room exploitation and language laboratory use but, as these courses are essentially written rather than spoken English courses, oral exploitation receives only a limited success. Tapes are also sometimes borrowed from the Institut fuer Film and Bild in Munich which as far as I can see produce good audio-visual material. Their loans however would suffer the same disadvantage as British Council tape loans; the material would not be "approved". Local Austrian teachers have recently adapted Louis Alexander's "Look, listen and learn" for use at primary and early secondary level and this course is now approved. Similar approval is now likely for other British courses. A secondary modern school course "Let's go on", a follow-up to "One, Two, Three, Go", is in preparation and the first year material complete.

5. English outside the educational system

5.1 There are various private language schools in Vienna, the longest-established being Kautezky. These schools usually train students for their Lehramtspruefung and also for the Cambridge exams. The so-called Matura-schulen are separate from these and concentrate entirely on training students who have left school for their university entrance examination the Matura.

5.2 There are in addition various private commercial schools in Austria affiliated to the Association of Merchants and Traders, the Kaufmannschaft, or the municipal authorities. Students at these schools take basically the same sort of examinations as those taken by the pupils in the state commercial schools.

English is studied far more intensively than one would expect at the hotels and catering schools (Hotelfachschulen). An entry into the profession demands good basic English and these schools are of quite high status. British exchange assistants have on occasions taught in these schools and at other schools of a vocational nature of Weinbauschulen (this despite the fact that virtually no Austrian wine, though very good, is exported).

6. British support for the teaching of English

a. i. The only British Council member of staff directly involved is the ELO/Assistant Representative II

ii. Several of the British Lektor posts in Austria are recruited through the Council. Such Lektors normally have an ELT qualification.

iii. N/A

iv. There are a small number of British exchange teachers in Austria and a much larger number of exchange assistants. Both are recruited through the Central Bureau for educational Visits and Exchanges. Most of them teach in some form of secondary school.

b. See 6a above.

c. There is close cooperation between the British Council and the Austrian Ministry of Education in the provision of ELT courses on special topics at national level and also with the Pedagogic Institutes in the provision of courses of a more general nature at local level. We also liaise closely with many of the regional teachers working groups (Arbeitsgemeinschaften) throughout Austria. See paras 3.3 and 3.4 above.

i. Direct teaching.

There are three Council-subsidised Lektor posts in Austria and an average of 55 exchange assistant teacher posts filled each year. The Council English Language Officer has instituted a teaching methods course at the University of Vienna and is also concerned with an in-service training scheme for primary school teachers of English in Vienna.

ii. Professional advice.

There is a bi-annual newsletter to teachers of English in Austria which includes comment on teaching techniques and recent published material. It is distributed to schools at Ministry cost.

The English Language Officer lectures at between 20 and 25 meetings of teachers working groups per annum.

Advice is also offered individually and to groups of teachers visiting the English Teachers' Library.

iii. Courses.

The annual three-week British Council Summer School recruits a Director of Studies, two lecturers and one tutorial assistant from Britain. The Director of Studies is supported by the English Language Officer and three locally-appointed tutorial assistants. The main concerns of the course are (a) recent developments in methodology (b) language practice and improvements (c) background studies.

There are currently 4/5 ELT courses pa on special topics. These are intended for grammar school teachers drawn from the whole of Austria. They are sponsored by the Federal Ministry, organised and run by the Council. The director of studies is either London appointed, supported by ELO, or ELO supported by Lektor/expatriate teachers. In 1975/76 the course will be:

Tests and Measurements in the Teaching of English
Guided Written and Oral Composition (twice)
Beginning English at 15+
Coping with new curricula trends in the upper forms.

ELO collaborates with the various Paedagogic Institutes, lecturing and providing language classes, on the in-service seminars which are provided at the local level for practising secondary modern type teachers. He is assisted by British lectors, exchange assistant teachers wherever possible.

iv. The Council liaises with the USIS in the provision of English-American Language and Literature seminars for secondary school teachers. The American staff are mainly drawn from Fulbright professor posts in Europe and the Council, predictably, provides the local English Language Officer plus Lektors/exchange assistants. There are on average two of these per year.

v. The exchange assistants are briefed on their teaching practice and responsibilities by the Council ELO as part of a three-day orientation course organised by the Federal Ministry.

d. i. There is a permanent Council ELT exhibition of texts and tapes which tours most of the seminars and courses, of 6c.iii. above. Librarian has recently arranged for other ELT support exhibitions (eg British Life and Institutions) to tour universities, teacher training colleges and courses, either independently of the ELT operation or as part of it.

ii. Specialist tourists in ELT speak at Arbeitsgemeinschaft meetings and in university and teacher training college English departments.

e. See paragraphs 2 and 4 above.

f. N/A

7. The American operation is ELT support rather than direct ELT. There is no qualified American ELT specialist in Austria and the principal support given by the USIS is in the area of background studies. There are on average two Anglo-American courses each year. To enrich their contribution the USIS occasionally brings across a visiting EFL methodologist from a neighbouring European country.

8. General Statement

It will be readily deduced from the preceding paragraphs that Austria, in ELT as in Sunday dress, is a traditional country, slow to respond to change.

However, traditional beliefs are slowly being eroded; the central administration is aware of the constant rumblings below the surface. Following the establishment of an office in Vienna, Longman-Langenscheidt have achieved a breakthrough with Louis Alexander's "Look, listen and learn" which is well established now. Other British course and class-room material will undoubtedly follow.

In this connection the British Council library of ELT materials is contributing to the erosion of outdated practices. Since the recent additons and publication of the new catalogues, loans to schools and teacher training colleges have more than doubled. A continuing supply from Inspectorate is vital if we are to keep abreast of the interest shown currently.

As ELT methods courses become more and more established and the teachers in the colleges of education better informed, the hold on outmoded practices will weaken. At universities too, and particularly in Vienna and Klagenfurt, younger teachers are taking over the methods courses and this influence must soon be felt in teaching practice in grammar schools.

Except in primary schools, Austria, unlike Germany, has never had an oral tradition in language teaching; oral techniques are now establishing themselves, though there is still too much emphasis on theoretical grammar, literature, and above all, background studies..

9. Current research and bibliography

The Austrian modern languages journal, Moderne Sprachen, publishes articles relevant to the teaching of English language and literature. It is a bi-annual publication and the chief editor is our friend Dr Alfred Weissgaerber. It is published by the Sprachinstitut Vienna, Universitaetsstrasse 11, A-1010 Vienna.

The magazin Erziehung und Unterricht, a bi-monthly journal, published by the Bundesverlag Wien, occasionally contains articles on language teaching.

The Zentrum fuer Schulversuche in Graz publishes an annual working paper (Arbeitsbericht) on the teaching of English in Austria. This contains mainly statistical data.

Research projects either in progress or recently completed and relevant to the teaching of English would include the following:

Bregar et al: I learn English, edition for use with lower streams of comprehensive and secondary modern schools, published 1974/75.

W.Fangl: Englisch im Sprachlabor, interim report in Moderne Sprachen 18th volume, January - June 1974. Habilitation thesis. Completion 1975(?).

G.Gerngross: Performance Objectives in language teaching in the age group 10 - 14. Doctoral thesis. Paedagogisches Institut der Universität Graz, completion 1977/78.

G.Gerngross et al: Let's go on, volume 1, 1975, Bundesverlag Wien, Vols 2-4 in preparation.

W.Kacowsky: Ann and Pat, revised edition, volume 1, 1974, Salzburger Jugendverlag. Volumes 2-5 in preparation.

W.Kacowsky: Ergebnisse einer empirischen Untersuchung zur Fehlerhäufigkeit im Englischunterricht von der 5. Schulstufe bis zum Universitaetseintritt.
To be published in October 1975.

Partman: Use your English, 1974, Bundesverlag Wien, companion to English the World Over, Volume 2.
English with a Purpose, 1975, Bundesverlag Wien, companion to English the World Over, Volume 3.

Preis et al: Look, listen and learn, Austrian edition, Volume 1, 1974
Volumes 2-4 in preparation (where the Austrian edition is not available, the original is used.

Schuster et al: Revised syllabus for the teaching of English in the upper forms, published as an Arbeitsbericht 1974.